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ABSTRACT

Working within constraints from the Texas Coordinating Board stipulating a solid doctoral program that would attract able students but at the same time would not look like a traditional Ph.D., the East Texas State University Department of Literature and Languages eventually came up with a doctorate that is unique in that it is overtly designed to prepare effective college teachers. The most important of its three overlapping sets of requirements is the Professional and Pedagogical Core of seven courses, basically required of all students. These courses include practical colloquiums in teaching various core curriculum English courses (such as Basic Writing, and Multi-Cultural Literature), seminars (Theory and Practice of Composition, Theory and Practice of Argumentative Writing), and a modern, updated bibliography course dealing with literary, rhetorical, and linguistic bibliography. The old requirement that every student have a major and two minors was reduced to a requirement that the student have a major in either Discourse Theory and Practice (including composition, rhetoric, stylistics, and linguistics) or in Critical Literacy (including literary history, major figures in literature, literary genres, and literary theory). The program has also moved from traditional, period-coverage courses to relatively wide-open seminars that can be repeated as the content shifts. By such creative re-structuring, course inventory was reduced from 47 courses to 40, while adding five new seminars. Work yet to be done includes revising the catalog, defining the nature of the dissertation, and a major revamping of the two-day doctoral written examination and subsequent oral examination. (SR)

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The English Doctorate as Teacher Training?

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A piece of Texas folk wisdom, reflecting the general conservatism of the culture, says, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." But two years ago, when we in the East Texas State University Department of Literature and Languages got the first reactions from the Texas Coordinating Board about our doctoral program, we were put in a paradoxical position. It wasn't broke, but we still had to fix it anyway. The alternative was to lose it.

The constraints we had to work within were clear but equally paradoxical. We needed a solid program that would be respectable in order both to attract able students and then to win them jobs in a competitive market. But that program couldn't look like a traditional English Ph. D. or the Coordinating Board wouldn't allow it, since it is not part of East Texas State University's assigned mission to have Ph. D. programs. Furthermore, we had to modernize the program and make it less traditional while working almost exclusively with the faculty already employed, a most traditional lot with an average age of about fifty five. (The youngest member of our department is 45, the eldest 68). Finally, we had to add new courses and increase the program's flexibility, but for logistical reasons, we also had to reduce the total number of courses in our inventory.

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And, as usual, we had to mediate among the varied interests and predispositions of a pretty recalcitrant group of tenured faculty, two-thirds of whom had been in the department for over twenty years.

After some feuding, a good deal of compromise, the outright rejection of one committee report, some verbal sleight-of-hand, and two visits from key

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players on the Coordinating Board Staff, we came up with what I modestly call a model for what all doctoral programs in English ought to be.

For two decades, our claim to uniqueness has been that our doctorate is overtly designed to prepare effective teachers. That will continue to be our focus. Its official title is "The College Teaching of English," and it carries the initials Ed. D. [1]

A bit of background is relevant here. East Texas State University began to take seriously the idea of scholarly preparation of college teachers as a matter of Darwinian survival in about 1967 when the department lost its Ph.D. in English, during a prior round of state coordinating. The degree "duplicated" one offered by a nearby state university.

So our new revision built on our old strength. In my view, the most important of our three overlapping sets of requirements is the Professional and Pedagogical Core of seven courses, basically required of all students (although there is one set of paired options). Three of these courses are pass/fail, practical colloquiums in teaching various core curriculum English courses--such as a Colloquium in Basic Writing and another in Multi-Cultural Literature. Required of all our students, whether they are composition majors or not, are two seminars that would be called composition courses at most schools. They correspond to our two-semester freshman composition requirement, as do two of the colloquiums. The first course is an Internship Seminar in Theory and Practice of Composition, in which all of our doctoral students, not just those in composition, will read Steve North on The Making of Knowledge in Composition, and such college methods texts as Erika Lindemann's A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers. The other required internship seminar is in Theory and Practice of Argumentative Writing. There may be another graduate program with such a course, but we haven't located it. The

pedagogical core also contains a modernized, updated bibliography course that deals with literary, rhetorical, and linguistic bibliography.

In a dramatic change to provide the flexibility that our students called for and that we needed for scheduling and staffing, we reduced our old requirement that every student have a major and three minors, to a requirement that the students have a major in either Discourse Theory and Practice or in Critical Literacy. (I'll say more about the nomenclature later.) This configuration replaced our older "coverage" model in which students had to have at least three or four courses in British Literature, three or four in American Literature, three or four in composition and rhetoric, and three or four in linguistics.

Some of our faculty find the new configuration shocking. It will be possible for a student to get a doctorate from us with only a single British literature course, and it could have been taken on the master's level. Possible but, I think, unlikely.

In order to allow some flexibility for faculty, and to cope with a rule that each course in the inventory has to be taught at least once every three years, we have also moved from pretty traditional, period-coverage courses to relatively wide-open seminars that can be repeated as the content shifts. Where we used to have a course in Classical Rhetoric, and another in Twentieth Century Rhetoric, we now have only a seminar called History and Theory of Rhetoric. Where we formerly had a course in Chaucer, one in Medieval British Literature, and a couple in the Renaissance, we now have a repeatable seminar in Selected British Literature Before 1660. You may imagine the howls of dismay from the British Literature faculty when such a descriptor was first proposed. The point is that the faculty may choose to offer any course they wish within that rubric, from a course in Beowulf, to one in Metaphysical

Poetry, and students will be able to repeat the course as they like. And to move a bit further in this same direction we added wild card "major figures" courses in both British Literature and American Literature. Last summer, under that rubric, one of our staff taught a highly successful course in the poetry of Thomas Hardy and Philip Larkin, a course she entitled "Bracketing the Twentieth Century." Another professor has offered a course in Robert Penn Warren, and will next year teach one in Eudora Welty and Flannery O'Connor.

By such creative re-structuring, we reduced our inventory from forty-seven courses to forty--while adding five new seminars, including one in Texts and Gender, one in the History of English as a Discipline, and one in Reading Theory for College English Teachers.

In order that the content areas all students were to study would not look to the Coordinating Board too much like those in a traditional Ph. D. in literature, and that they would look up-to-date in the profession, we went on a Madison Avenue search for the right names. We eventually arrived at the two I mentioned above. Discourse Theory and Practice covers a set of courses that includes composition, rhetoric, stylistics, and linguistics. I am in a running battle with the major linguist in the department, who says that the phrase as we are using it makes no sense. He would prefer "Theory and Practice of Written Communication." I am sometimes tempted to give him an Alice-in-Wonderland answer that it is all a matter of whether we are to be masters of words or they of us.

For the set of courses including literary history, major figures in literature, genres, and literary theory, we adopted the name Critical Literacy. The term has a certain cachet about it, drawing as it does on both the Literacy and Critical Theory movements, but we are worried that it will be seriously misleading to both prospective students and prospective employers--

even if we can get the department to use it. If any of you have an appropriate term that is both modern and traditional and that does not hint at any connection between our work and that of European Cultural Criticism, we would welcome suggestions.

A lot remains to be done. And the Coordinating Board will be coming back in three years to see how we have succeeded. First, we have yet to complete all the red-tape of revising our catalog to reflect the new program. Second, we haven't confronted the nature of the dissertation that will be approved in the future, although we did promise the Coordinating Board that all dissertations will in some way reflect our pedagogical focus. That is easily enough done with the studies in Discourse Theory and Practice, but it will be a more wrenching shift for dissertations done on literary topics. Third, the shift from four required fields of study to two, along with the less survey-oriented course structure, will require a major revamping of our two-day doctoral written examination and the subsequent oral. We haven't begun to face that yet.

Frankly, I think that what we did under external duress led us into a stimulating new stage in our evolution. I only hope that we are now fit enough and adaptable enough to carry it through to completion and to survive the continuing threats from limited state budgets, a disastrous job market, and the continuing stigma of the initials Ed. D.

[1] It turns out that this is not a new idea. In 1940 in The Kenyon Review, Hade Saunders complained of "too many misfit graduate students who will become incompetent teachers" and the "grey wastes of the requirements for the Ph. D." (431). Warner Rice, then the Chair at Michigan, recommended it in 1959 and again in 1963. James Miller, editor of College English, suggested it also in 1963. And after a major survey of thirty-three doctoral programs in English, Ken Eble in 1972 recommended teaching experience with informed supervision as a requirement for attaining a doctorate in English. Don Cameron Allen had made a similar recommendation in The Ph.D in English and American Literature in 1968, where he wrote "a part of the regular doctoral course should be required supervised teaching for one or two years." He said it was "unfair to society to send out pedagogically ignorant Ph. D.'s" (117).

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